

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Report of the Proceedings of 72nd Annual Conference held at Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square, LONDON WC 1, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 16th, 17th
and 18th April 1976.

ATTENDANCE

FRIDAY: All 16 Branches represented
35 Delegates present.

SATURDAY: All 16 Branches represented
39 Delegates present.

SUNDAY: All 16 Branches represented
34 Delegates present.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

INCOME

Collections	£98-99
Literature sales	17-28
Book sales	26-50
Canteen income over expenditure	37-77

EXPENDITURE

Hall hire	£223-00.
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It was Agreed by Conference that Westminster Branch delegates be allowed to sit in accordance with Rule 8, and that Lancaster and Oxford Branch delegates be allowed to sit in accordance with Rule 22.

Chair-comrade: Cde D Davies.

Deputy Chair-comrade: Cde P Howard.

Elected on a motion of George and Cottis.

Tellers: Agreed that Standing Orders Cttee act as tellers.

PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED AT 11-10 A.M.

I AMENDMENTS TO RULES

Rule 2 (Swansea Branch): "On line one, delete '25p' and replace with '50p'".

Lost 13-31.

Amend (Lewisham Branch): "Delete '50p' and replace with '40p'".

Lost 12-32.

Amend (Redbridge Branch): "Delete '50p' and replace with '35p'".

Lost 9-35.

Rule 3 (SW London Branch): "That this Rule be amended by deleting the whole of the last sentence (commencing 'A member leaving..') and substituting with the sentence 'A member taking up residence abroad shall automatically cease to be a member of the Party.'; thus reverting to the pre-1974 wording."

Lost 11-31.

One delegate said that the argument for the original rule -- that it was not possible to keep control of members abroad -- no longer applied in conditions of improved communications. Others said they were tired of the controversy.

Rule 5 (Glasgow Branch): "That this Rule be amended by deleting from lines 3 and 4 the words '..or publish political literature, other than that approved by the Party,...'".

Carried 26-19.

Rule 9 (Swansea Branch): "On line two, delete '20p' and replace with '40p'".

Amend. (Lewisham Branch): Delete '40p' and replace with '30p'".

Amend. (Redbridge Branch): "Delete '40p' and replace with '28p'".

(In view of the defeat of the Motion and Amendments on Rule 2, the Motion and Amendments on Rule 9 were not put.)

Rule 10 (Glasgow Br): "That the whole of this Rule be deleted and replaced with the following: 'Branches, Groups and members shall neither publish, sell or distribute any political literature in the name of the Party which has not been approved by the Executive Cttee, excepting handbills advertising meetings.'".

Carried 24-20.

After some discussion it was Agreed to vote on the Resn concerning Rule 10 before that concerning Rule 5. It was argued that the effect of passing both Resns would be to tidy up the overlap between the two Rules. Some objection was made that the reintroduction of the term 'political' would lead to endless controversy. Other delegates said that only what members said or did in the name of the Party should be subject to Party control.

Rule (12) (Haringey Br): "That this Rule be amended by: (a) inserting the words 'within one month of the Annual Conference' between the existing words 'annually' and 'by' on line two; (b) deleting the words '1st October' on the bottom line and substituting with the words '1st January'. As a consequence of this being carried, the EC for 1976 shall remain in office until Easter 1977 but thereafter the EC shall be re-elected annually within one month after Annual Conference."

Lost 16-27.

Rule 16 (Haringey Br): "That this Rule be amended by inserting the words 'delegate' and 'to' on line 2; and by inserting the words 'or Chairman' between the existing words 'delegate' and 'who' on line 3."

Carried 22-21.

Discussion was brief. Opinion was almost evenly divided between those who thought a non-EC chair-comrade was necessary to ensure proper democratic procedure, and those who thought delegates capable of running their own conference, whoever was in the chair.

cont'd.

II EC REPORT TO CONFERENCE

(No discussion of any items up to Central Br Sec)

Central Br Sec

In reply to a question about a pre-conference meeting mentioned in a questionnaire sent to CB members, the CB Sec said that if members wished this could be arranged with effect from 1977.

SS Prod Cttee

It was Agreed to combine discussion with Agenda Rsns 2(a) & 2(b).
Resolution 2(a) (Polton Br): "This Conference instructs the EC to have published a propaganda Paper." Lost 5-36.

(2 abst)

It was suggested that the SS is mainly an educational journal for Party members. There was need for a second journal specifically designed for new readers, especially since initial contact with the Party was now more often through the written word than outdoor meetings. Such a journal could present ideas simply, without diluting our principles. Several objections were raised to the Resn on grounds of practicality. A member of the SSPC pointed out that no suggestion had been made about distribution. The loss on the SS was largely due to low circulation. Other delegates urged that the Party could not afford a second paper, and that the SS itself could contain a mixture of articles of immediate appeal and those of a more theoretical nature.

Resolution 2(b) (Westminster Br): "This Conference approves that the SS now has a regular section reserved for letters from readers and considers that it would now be further enhanced if:

1. Readers are invited to comment on other letters.
2. Party members are encouraged to send letters expressing constructive views.

3. The SSPC is requested to append its replies to letters only when necessary, and then briefly.

The SSPC should continue to exercise discretion in the selection and cutting of letters but, by allowing the correspondence section of the SS a life of its own, continuity between issue and issue may be strengthened and the feeling of identity between the reader and the SS can be encouraged."

Amend (SW London Br): "Delete all after the word '...letters' on line two." Lost 11-27. (7 Abst)

Amend (Camden Br): "Delete all after the word '...and' on line 3 and replace with the words 'this Conference endorses the present policy of the SSPC in relation to correspondence columns.'" Carried 25-14.

(5 Abst)

Amend (Swansea Br): "Delete from the first sentence all after the words '...readers' on line 2/3. Delete clauses '1' and '2'." Lost 8-28.

(7 Abst)

Amend (Westminster Br): "Add at the end of clause '2' the words '...on articles and correspondence'." Lost 11-26.

(7 Abst)

Sub-Res CARRIED 27-10.

The aim of Westminster Resn was to enable readers, as well as editors, to pursue topics in the SS. There had always been uncertainty whether members should contribute, but there was no case for subterfuge and the editors' discretion would remain to prevent any attempts to pursue Party controversy or personal vendettas. The addendum was intended merely as clarification. Several delegates feared that a Conference Resn would restrict rather than enlarge editorial possibilities. Letters were wanted only if they had propaganda value. An SSPC member explained that letters were looked at solely in that light. Some gave the opportunity to make some point not made in an article, others were unsuitable (eg. if they came from ex-members with a grievance). All received some sort of reply.

CONFERENCE ADJOURNED FOR LUNCH AT 1-20PM AND RE-CONVENED AT 2-30PM.

Fraternal Greetings were received from the SP of New Zealand and Ode Russell (International Sec). It was Agreed that the Gen Sec reply to them.

Experimental Seating Arrangements for the Saturday session of Conference
Agreed.

II EC REPORT: SSPC (Cont'd)

The question of cartoons in the SS was raised, and it was Agreed to discuss.

Floor Res (Donnelly, Glasgow Br and Cottis, Southend): "That this Conference is in favour of cartoons in the SS." Carried 17-8.

Strong views were expressed on both sides. There was agreement that the important question was whether the cartoons succeeded in making a point. Some delegates thought not: there was a danger of talking down, and we should at least be aiming our propaganda at those workers who are literate. The cartoons departed from the high standards of definition and factual evidence always insisted on by the Party. It was impossible to keep continuity in a monthly journal. Against this it was argued that the cartoons provided an immediate means of propaganda and were an important way of providing an impact in a world where visual images had assumed great importance. They reminded us that Socialism was about fun. Between these opposing views, a number of delegates were in favour of cartoons but expressed misgivings about the current strip in the SS.

Propaganda Cttee

It was agreed to combine discussion with Item for Discussion (d) Westminster Br: "The Party, Its Image and Propaganda."

Delegates stressed that the Party must achieve a breakthrough in propaganda. Complacency after one good meeting or a radio broadcast was dangerous. The value of concentrating propaganda in a particular geographical area was emphasised, and Westminster reported that they had arranged activities in this light.

Floor Res (Donnelly, Glasgow Br and Craig, Edinburgh Br) "That this Conference recommends the EC to draw up a plan to improve propaganda in a concerted fashion in a specific area, and submit it to Annual Delegate Meeting." Lost 13-16.

Objection was made that responsibility for propaganda lay with Branches, not the EC. Members could make their own arrangements to travel to different areas. An alternative view was that concentrating on particular individuals could be an effective form of propaganda. Mention was made several times of the work of the Media Cttee, and it was thought that expansion of its work could lead to a growth in effectiveness. The movers argued that the EC would only be drawing up a plan which would be discussed and not necessarily acted upon.

Floor Res (Tenner & Coleman, Westminster Br): "That this Conference recommends the EC to undertake a survey to establish members' attitudes to the Party's propaganda methods and image; the results to be reported to Autumn Delegate Meeting." Carried 16-3.

Pamphlets Cttee

A Bolton Br delegate asked why no leaflet on unemployment had been published, in view of a recommendation from the last Autumn Delegate Meeting. A Pamphlets Cttee member replied that when the EC had received a draft leaflet it had taken the view that though the draft, suitably revised, might be appropriate for local distribution, the topic was best dealt with nationally by articles in the SS. The Pamphlets Cttee would act otherwise if so instructed by the EC.

Floor Res (O'Neil and Perrin, Lancaster Br): "That this conference recommends the EC to instruct Pamphlets Cttee to produce a leaflet on unemployment." Carried 21-4.

Some EC members drew attention to the heavy work-load of the Pamphlets Cttee in revising several major pamphlets, but it was argued that less work would be required on a leaflet.

Education Organiser

The Education Organiser reported that in general he waited for requests from members before beginning a speakers' class. There was likely to be another one in the summer. In reply to a question he

pointed out that a syllabus for education classes already exists and could be distributed to non-London members. He and a member of the Education Cttee drew attention to a correspondence course for non-London members shortly to begin. Branches and Central Br members had been contacted and so far 25 members had expressed a wish to begin.

Books Dept.

It was pointed out that, in addition to sometimes making money for the Party, the Dept makes donated books generally available within the Party and is able to supply Marxist classics to members in areas where they are not easily obtained. Sales are restricted to members.

It was Agreed to combine discussion with Item for Discussion (e) (Haringey Br) "The book 'The Monument - the story of the S.P.G.B.' by Cde R Barltrop of the SSPC - with reference to: (a) the statements made about the Party's principles, Branches and members (b) the evidence for these statements (c) the effect of the book upon members (d) the effect of the book upon non-members, both sympathetic and hostile with special reference to future propaganda and publicity."

Floor Res (Lee and Vein, Haringey Br): "That notwithstanding the merits of Cde Barltrop's book 'The Monument - the story of the S.P.G.B.' this Conference cannot give official endorsement to it. Furthermore, this Conference condemns any actions of Party members contrary to the aims and values of the Socialist movement, written of in the book." Lost 2-23.

A Haringey Delegate expressed disquiet at the damaging suggestions made in the book about the behaviour of Party members. Other delegates questioned whether Conference should discuss the book at all. A member of the Standing Orders Cttee replied that it was for delegates, and not the Cttee, to decide. An EC member thought the Res futile, since Conference was not called upon to endorse the book. One delegate thought that if claims made in it were false the Party should answer them. In answer to a request the Gen Sec read out an EC resn passed in reply to correspondence about it.

Floor Res (Wood, Lewisham and Devereux, Camden): "That this Conference endorses the proposition carried by the EC relating to Cde Barltrop's book." Carried 20-4.

(NB The proposition referred to occurs in Item 3(D) of the Minutes of 8th Mtg, 73rd E.C. 24th Feb 1976: "...this book has been published as a private venture by a member. The Party does not publicize the book but merely assists members to acquire it if they so desire.")

CONFERENCE ADJOURNED AT 6-00 PM.

SATURDAY

CONFERENCE RE-COMMENCED AT 2-00 PM.

II EC REPORT (CONT'D)

Auditors' Report

In this connexion one of the Auditors raised a point about the cost of the SS, and it was Agreed to discuss.

Floor Res (Robertson and Furls, Oxford): "That this Conference recommends that the price of the SS be increased from 10p to 20p." Lost overwhelmingly (no count taken)

The movers argued that some action like this was necessary to counter the danger of the Party going bankrupt, but delegates stressed again and again that the solution lay in all members making greater efforts to sell the SS. Two Branches reported that they already subsidised the SS: a price increase would make it even more difficult to sell. An SSPC member reported that with a print of 4000 the SS cost 10p per copy, but this would fall to 9p if 5000 were printed. The Central Organiser reported that sales were around 3000 in Spring, slightly more in Summer. Various suggestions were made for increasing sales: efforts should be made at railway stations, more newsagents should be contacted, shopping precincts should be used, members should find out about opponents' rallies and canvass them.

Lit Sales Cttee

A member of the Cttee gave an energetic practical demonstration of how to sell the SS. A delegate asked why the EC had not been prepared to meet the full expenses of the Cttee's selling at the Labour Party Conference. It was replied that local support had not been forthcoming and that in view of the cost to the Party that was where the effort should have come from. EC members added that if it was thought the amount of lit likely to be sold would not have justified the expense, especially as the 3 Party Members who had offered to go were inexperienced in selling and not CLSC members. A Lancaster delegate regretted that local members there had not been contacted: they could have arranged accomodation more cheaply. A question was raised about the SS subscribers' list. HO Assistant replied that it consisted of app. 500 individuals and 300 libraries.

Publicity Cttee

(No discussion)

Overseas Contacts Sec

The Sec reported that the week end in Paris referred to in the report was unlikely to materialise. Every companion party except the SPGB had contributed an article to the special issue of IFW. The SSPC was investigating to find out why no article had been sent.

Tapes Cttee

(No discussion)

Central Organiser

In reply to a question about the formation of new Branches, the CO said that Sunderland and Manchester were being kept under review, but members in both areas had problems about meeting together at a suitable time and place.

International Sec

It was noted that a comrade had now offered to take over the job of Review Journals Editor.

Forms A Cttee

A Cttee member replied to a query about the figures in the report that the discrepancy arose from a number of cases where correspondence was continuing. Members stressed the importance of personal contact wherever possible.

A MOTION to adopt the EC Report by Robertson, Oxford Br and Cottis, Southend Br was Carried 29-0.

MOTION (Robertson, Oxford and Cottis, Southend) "That a telegramme be sent to the BDS regretting our failure to contribute to the special issue of IFW but wishing them success in all future efforts." Agreed.

III BRANCH REPORTSWestminster Branch

There had been intensive propaganda activity in the Church St Ward in preparation for the GLC By-election. The Party polled 96 votes and the Branch considered the campaign successful, with debates against the Labour Party and LPYS. Most of the work had been done by only 7 or 8 members. The Branch was now advertising meetings by poster in the Underground.

West London Branch

There were 29 members, and an average attendance was 7 or 8. There had been 3 or 4 talks from Party speakers. The only external activity was a meeting with a Labour MP.

Swansea Branch

9 members, with an average attendance of 7 or 8. Meetings were now held twice instead of once a month, but there was a problem in finding a decent meeting place. The Branch was trying to increase SS sales, the only avenue of activity in a town which was dead after 5 o'clock in the evening.

S.W. LONDON Branch

Some £2 of lit per week is sold at Earls Court in the summer. Individual members take 2 doz SS each in winter to off-set the fall in sales. At least 6 members had helped Westminster Branch in the GLC election. Members were also involved in committee work in the Party.

Southend Branch

The Branch had reformed last autumn. Regular indoor meetings were held, with tapes and discussion, and there had been success in canvassing lit in December and Jan. A meeting on pollution had been held on Canvey Island, and this had been followed by letters in the local press. 11 members in the Branch, average attendance 9 or 10.

Redbridge Branch

About 30 members, average attendance 11 or 12. Meetings are held twice a month, and lit is sold in a college and Romford market place. Lectures are also arranged.

Oxford Branch

Formed in February. Meetings were held in a member's house to save money, but there was the possibility of taking over a school. Every other week was a Branch Meeting, alternating with discussions on Marxist classics. It was necessary to make more members since some were students and would be leaving the area, and with this in mind a series of meetings aimed at students was planned for the winter term.

Mid-Herts Branch

Meetings were held at Stevenage and Welwyn. 15 Members, 9 active. The loss of 2 members to university had made it difficult to get a quorum, especially as the members were spread out. There had been some assistance from HO and London Members. Lit Sales at a local exhibition had been very good. At a lit stall in Stevenage shopping centre sales of the SS had been 7 dozen in summer, and were now 6 dozen. There had also been letters to the local press.

Lewisham Branch

There had been a danger of the Branch collapsing at one point, but then attendances had improved. Fortnightly meetings. One of the problems was that the Br covered a large area, and there was no outdoor station. Canvassing was at a low ebb, but it was hoped to remedy this in the summer.

Lancaster Branch

Formed in the last month. It was intended in the next year to hold regular meetings in the town and the university. Sales of the SS had fallen from 5 to 3½ dozen, but had been held at this level by pub sales. There had been letters to the local press. There was a possibility of 2 further meetings.

Haringey Branch

There had been some meetings with guest speakers. Individual members supplied newsagents with SS, and attendances remained steady.

Glasgow Branch

51 members, average attendance 12 at Br and outdoor meetings. Outdoor meetings had been cut to one per weekend and audience and lit sales had both fallen, but it was hoped to have two meetings again in the summer. There had been a debate with the Scottish Republican Club, resulting in a letter to the press. Classes on economic history and current affairs had been held, with an average attendance of 10. It had been a disappointing year, but there was hope of better things.

Edinburgh Branch

Mainly summer and outdoor meetings at the Mound and Dundee (which was shared with Glasgow Br). Membership had fallen to 18 from 35/36. The SS was sold on Sat afternoons in Princes St and in pubs, with sales of 12 doz in winter, 20 dozen in summer. Indoor meetings had been very poor because of the political climate. It was essential to keep meetings on a regular weekly basis, and this had been maintained.

Camden Branch

Midday meetings were held at Tower Hill on Thursdays all the year round, weather permitting, and these had been very successful, resulting in a new member. 17 members, average attendance 8. The majority of active Branch members were also active in the Party on the EC, Cttees, etc.

Branch membership had fallen from 16 to 7, partly because of the reduction of Lancaster Br, and partly because of members leaving the Party. Activity and SS sales were lower than ever before for the same reasons. 2 Members were also in Manchester Group and thus active elsewhere.

Birmingham Branch

The Branch had had its worst year since 1948. There were difficulties in remaining as a branch, because of age, illness, overwork and the problem of members leaving for college. Weekly meetings with an average attendance of 4. Central support from the Party was needed. There were similar problems to Swansea's because the heart of the city had been ripped out and meeting places were difficult to find.

IV RESOLUTIONS

1a) Mid Herts Branch: "That the Draft Terms of Reference for the General and Assistant Secretaries (a) be amended by the deletion of the whole of clause '1' and the re-numbering of the remaining clauses."
Lost 10-31.

The movers argued that many routine items reached the EC table which should not: if the Res were carried, it would leave the the Gen Sec more time to deal with such items without reference to the EC, and the EC with more time for organising propaganda activity and policy-making. There were many things wrong with HO administration - forms whose purpose had been forgotten, too many committees, etc. Such inefficiency would not be tolerated with Party speakers or writers. A Gen Sec relieved of minute-keeping could make suggestions for reorganisation. In reply to a question the Gen Sec said that he sympathised with the view that too many trivial items reached the EC, but felt it important for a Gen Sec to take minutes as a means to keeping in touch with current EC business. One delegate questioned the idea that one or two individuals should be allowed to decide what was fit business for the EC. Several delegates thought that the Terms of Reference would in any case only be guidelines, and that the Gen Sec and Asst Gen Sec should be left to do their jobs as they saw fit. The possibility was raised of a second Asst Gen Sec, if necessary.

Floor Res (M & C Judd, Lewisham): "That this Conference adopts the draft Terms of Reference for Party Officers as drawn up by the EC"
Carried 22-2.

Amendment (Robertson, Oxford and Cox, Mid-Herts) "Delete clause D1 and insert 'The Auditors shall report if proper books are not being kept.'
Lost 8-19.

Delegates expressed the view that clause D1 already met the point intended by the Amendment. A question was raised about mentioning the function of Trustees in counter-signing cheques, but no Amendment was moved.

3 SW London Branch: "This Conference strongly urges the EC to make all the necessary preparations to contest the next General Election in at least 2 constituencies in the London area and to carry out a thorough investigation into the prospects of contesting a further constituency outside of London."

Amend. (Mid Herts Br): "Delete all after the word '...Election' on line two and replace with the words '...in any constituency where there is sufficient Party support and where there has been adequate pre-election preparation.'"

Carried 40-0 (2 abst)
Sub-Res Carried 40-0
(2 abst)

One or two delegates had misgivings about how worthwhile it was to contest General Elections; in view of the expense. Against this it was argued that General Elections provide special conditions for making our ideas felt, that it was important to show the opposition that we are active, and that elections provide the culmination for Branch activity. Delegates agreed overwhelmingly that the Resn would be merely

pious if Branches did not put in a lot of hard work before an election period, and an EC member pointed out that follow-up work afterwards is equally important.

4b) Swansea Br: "That the Party's name be changed to the 'World Socialist Party of Great Britain'."

Lost 4-36 (2 abst)

Addendum (Westminster Br): "Add at the end '...unless, after seeking legal advice, it is shown that such a change of name would prejudice the Party.'"

Lost 15-24 (2 abst)

It was argued that the Party should make clear by its name that Socialism is international, as some companion Parties do; but delegates were sceptical whether a change of name would make much difference in propaganda terms.

CONFERENCE ADJOURNED AT 6-30PM.

SUNDAY

CONFERENCE RE-CONVENED AT 11-00 AM

IV RESOLUTIONS (CONT'D)

4a) Glasgow Br: "That this Conference re-affirms the statement on violence approved by the 1965 Annual Conference, viz: "This Conference re-affirms the Party's attitude to violence, viz: '...That only a democratically elected Socialist majority can introduce Socialism after the capture of the machinery of Government; violence will only be used in the event of a recalcitrant minority attempting to forcibly overthrow Socialism.'"

Addendum (Camden Br): "Add at the end '...; but that the EC be instructed to prepare, in the light of present conditions, a more detailed statement of the Party's attitude to violence subsequent to the establishment of Socialism, for submission to the 1977 Annual Conference." (Not put)

Amendment (Lewisham Br): "Delete all after the word 'Conference' on line one and replace with the words '...affirms that only a democratically elected Socialist majority can introduce Socialism after the capture of the machinery of government. Should an anti-Socialist, undemocratic minority, attempt to sabotage or disrupt social organisation and administration, a Socialist society would necessarily take such action as was requisite to ensure social harmony.'"

Carried 27-17

Sub-Res Carried
27-17.

It was agreed to combine with Item for Discussion b) (SW London Br): "This Conference stresses that all violence is repugnant to Socialists and recognises the purely hypothetical nature of the proposition embodied in the Glasgow Br Resn '4a); and that the establishment of Socialism will be achieved through the democratic process of voting, backed by majority understanding on a world scale. The idea that it could be forcibly overthrown is therefore something of a fantasy."

Many points were made in the course of a lengthy debate. There was discussion of the origin of the item and its connexion with the EC's criticism of the French pamphlet on the Declaration of Principles. Some delegates took the view that the pamphlet merely reiterated the 1965 Conference Resn and that the EC should not try to change Party policy. The first point was challenged by an EC member, what had been objected to was talk in the pamphlet of armies re-organised on a democratic basis, which was meaningless and a gift to our opponents. Other EC members felt that this was not the original ground of the EC's objection, and some delegates thought the phrase in question could be explained by reference to the 6th Principle. Against the Resn it was argued that no clear idea had been presented of how a minority could threaten to overthrow Socialism. It was replied that even if overthrow were impossible, a minority could cause disruption and would have to

cont'd

(28)
tion is with. In support of the addendum various criticisms were made
1965 statement, e.g. that it wrongly equates forcible restraint
violence. Some delegates thought the issue required more than a
Conference Resolution; some objected to the vagueness of the Amendment,
but others thought it welcome for its lack of specificity. It stuck
to the known facts, and it was not our job to decide such issues on
behalf of a future Socialist society.

Floor Res (R and M Barltrop, Camden Br): "That the EC be requested to
prepare, in the light of present conditions, a more detailed statement
of the Party's attitude to violence subsequent to the establishment of
Socialism, for submission to the 1977 Annual Conference."

Carried 18-12.

A delegate queried whether the re-presentation of the Camden Br
Addendum as a floor res in order, but the Chair ruled that it was.

CONFERENCE ADJOURNED FOR LUNCH AT 1-40 PM AND RE-CONVENED AT 2-30 PM.

V ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION.

a) Glasgow Br: "Does the SPGB support workers in organising Trade
Unions and using these organisations democratically to improve their
real wages and conditions of work and to resist their employers'
attempts to encroach upon their present wages and conditions?"

Some delegates took the view that the Party had a great deal to
say about Trade Unions at a time when their leaders were deeply involved
in running capitalism in league with governments and their undemocratic
functioning was being exposed. They represented, too, only the interests
of particular sections of the working class. From the floor a member
objected that though this was largely true, some unions ran democratically
with instructed delegates, etc. The Party must be concerned with class
struggle on the industrial front, and Trade Unions were the only
organisations which pursued this. Questions were raised about what
"support" amounted to, and in another floor contribution it was pointed
out that Trade Unions never gave the Party any support.

Floor Res (Venni and Donnelly, Glasgow Br): "The SPGB is in favour of
workers organising democratically in order to improve their real wages
and conditions of work and to resist their employers' attempts to
encroach upon their present wages and conditions." Carried 25-7.

A question was raised about the pamphlet on Trade Unions and a
member of the Pamphlets Cttee reported that a draft which the EC had
received was considered incomplete. Advice had been passed on
regarding the necessary chapter headings, and this work was now in
progress.

Floor Res (O'Neil, L neaster Br and Purls, Oxford Br): "That a brief
summary of the contents of the Trade Union pamphlet be circulated to
all Branches before publication." Lost 8-26.

It was objected that this would cause excessive delay in producing
the pamphlet and that an elected cttee should be trusted to do the job.

c) Westminster Br "What is Proletarian Science?"

The item arose from an article in the SS, and it was suggested
that scientific Socialism is proletarian science. In contrast bourgeois
sociologists viewed capitalism as fixed, not in its historical context.
A delegate made the point that natural sciences, too, were developed in
line with the interests of the capitalist class. One floor contributor
noted that even Marxism had been used in a selective way to benefit the
capitalists, and another said that science and knowledge were parts of
the means of production developed under capitalism. They were misused,
but could be used in a proper way in Socialism.

f) Westminster Br: (Re Groups - previously Res 1b) on the Preliminary
Agenda - arising out of the Floor Res carried 20-9 at Annual Conference
1975, recommending "...that a Draft Constitution and Standing Orders for
Groups be drawn up by the EC for consideration by the Party...")

"Groups shall consist of Party members only. Subject to EC approval, they may be formed by not less than three members, with a view to the eventual formation of a Branch. They shall organise meetings and propaganda activity under the auspices of the EC. Non-members shall be encouraged to attend meetings and participate in discussions, but decisions on Group activity shall be taken by a vote of Party members only."

It was argued that, whatever may have happened in the past, Groups now consisted of members and existed to make more members, and eventually to form a Branch. This was reiterated by several delegates. There should be a change in organisation to reflect this. On the other hand, fears were expressed that this would be creating two units within the Party. An EC member recalled that the EC had appointed an ad hoc committee on Groups, arising out of the floor res passed at 1975 Conf, but the cttee had considered that it was impossible to draw up a draft constitution, etc, when Groups were undefined. So Conference had to decide whether Groups were to be updated. A former Groups Organiser reiterated that Groups had in practice consisted of 2 or 3 members plus sympathisers trying to gather enough members to form a Branch. It was also possible for a Branch to revert to a Group if it could not survive as a Branch. There were really two types of Group, those consisting of Central Br members away from London and those (eg Hampstead) which were near a large Branch. The latter should be under the control of a Branch and there would then be no need to define Groups in the Rule Book.

Floor Res (Coleman & Tenner, Westminster Br): "This Conference approves the definition of a Group contained in Westminster Branch's Item for Discussion (f), viz. 'Groups shall consist of Party members only. Subject to EC approval, they may be formed by not less than three members, with a view to the eventual formation of a Branch. They shall organise meetings and propaganda activity under the auspices of the EC. Non-members shall be encouraged to attend meetings and participate in discussions but decisions on Group activity shall be taken by a vote of Party members only.'" Carried 19-5.

g) Westminster Br: "The extent of the EC's and Standing Orders Cttee's authority to remove, amend or relegate items submitted by Branches for inclusion on Conference or Delegate Meeting Agendas."

The Gen Sec read out the EC Resn which had been passed in connexion with the Westminster Conference Resn. (4th EC Mtg, item 2(A): "That the Standing Orders Cttee be instructed to remove Resn 1(B) from 'Resolutions' and place it under 'Items for Discussion'..." 5th EC mtg, items 4(a), in reply to a letter from Westminster Br, insisting on the reinstatement of the item as a Conference Resolution, "That Westminster be informed that the reason why the EC deleted the resn and placed it as an item for discussion on the Conference agenda was because a majority of EC members were of the opinion that it conflicted with Rule 6.")

Some delegates questioned whether the original Resn did conflict with Rule 6, others argued that this was not the point. It was not the job of the EC to decide what Conference may discuss. They and the Standing Orders Cttee had the right to place before Conference their view that a Resn was out of order, but it was for delegates to decide whether the view was correct. On the particular issue, an EC member pointed out that the EC had not seen the Preliminary Agenda, containing the Westminster Br item as a Resn, before it went out to Branches. One delegate suggested that S.O.Cttee could have raised the matter with the Branch. A member of the S.O.Cttee regretted that, as time at Conference had run out, there had been no opportunity for the Cttee to give its own view of the matter.

Floor Res (Wilson & Simkins, SW London Br): "That delegates endorse the EC's action regarding the Westminster Br Resn." Lost Overwhelmingly (no count taken)

h) Mid Herts Br: "The terms governing the transfer of members from one Branch to another."

There being no time remaining, it was Agreed to defer consideration until Autumn Delegate Meeting.

Fraternal Greetings It was Agreed to send Fraternal Greetings to Cde Jacobs and Lake.